

Focus Group Guidelines
October 30, 2006
Des Moines, IA
IA-3
5 Kerry/4 Bush

I. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Confidentiality
- Mirrors, audio and videotapes
- Respondent introductions

Jim –

Adam – Born in DSM, married, no kids.

Ben – From IA, self employed. 2 kids.

Curtis – 3 kids, 2 boys 1 girl.

Doug – Born in DSM, work for public schools. 3 kids.

Evan, IA Farmer, married 2 daughters.

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II. Direction of the Country (20 minutes)

1. Thinking generally about the country, are things moving in the right direction or wrong direction? [**VERY EXTENSIVE – PROBE AND LISTEN**]

Wrong.

Wrong.

I think they're not necessarily going in the right direction.

I agree. Definitely not going in the right direction.

Things could be handled differently over there. Iraq.

Not just that, the gay marriages, a lot of things. If you go to church, a lot of things. Getting into religious wars.

Fuel prices, illegal immigration. Could make a list. Things have suffered in the last 5/6 years.

I don't necessarily think it's been just the last 5 or six years. Festering for quite a bit of time. One of my biggest concerns is illegal immigration. I don't think a change in presidency is going to get things done correctly.

I think it's foreign policy is in the wrong direction. Personally my occupation is the best year of my life because of government policy. New water and energy policy is — conservation security program. It's like an entitlement program that rewards farmers for conservation practices.

Energy factors.

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Both houses aren't getting along, the presidency. America itself is just split. Hardline opinion one way or the other. I don't know the answer. . . But it seems like we're going to hell in a handbasket quickly.

I think that's true, no common sense. It's just our party's better than your party. It's not working.

Two parties aren't working. Gotta be alternatives.

It's kinda simplistic to say right/wrong. Some things are going fine, others aren't.

I think it's going the wrong direction. People are getting frustrated by the Iraq war. The debt is rising because of short sighted plans for rich people. Somebody's going to have to pay for it.

We need to find a way to get out of Iraq.

We're trying to push democracy on countries that run better without democracy. We went after that guy in Afghanistan and ended up going after Saddam. There wasn't the WMD in the first place.

It's really not a war over there. . . they're not letting the soldiers do what they have to. The soldiers aren't able to do what they can to stay alive.

I kind of agree with that. It seems like we've gotten so politically correct that even our military isn't allowed to do things necessary to either win the war or take control. They're just — If you're going to go to war, go to war and take care of business. It seems like everything is just put on hold.

- What things are going right?
- What things are going in the wrong direction?
- **Probe national direction vs. local direction**

2. How about the economy? What's going on with the economy here in Iowa?

- **[PROBE]** Rising prices (especially gas and health care), employment, any inflation fears
 - How did things get to this point?
 - What direction do you think the economy will go from here – will it continue to get worse, will it start to get better, or will it continue at the current level?
 - **[if not mentioned]** What about immigration?
-

3. Let's talk specifically about the war in Iraq...

- **[PROBE]** What are your feelings about our continued involvement over there?
 - **[EXPLORE]** Loss of American lives, cost, no plan or exit strategy, weaker at home; war on terrorism

4. **[OLDER VOTERS AND SENIORS]** How about the new prescription drug program through Medicare? What are your impressions of that?

III. Associations (20 minutes)

1. Jim Nussle

Millionaire.

For the millionaires.

Way too far to the right for me.

For the people with lots.

Make money for the big guys and to heck with the little guys

Washington.

Congressman. Mostly a negative thing, probably.

I was thinking Washington, Myself.

2. Chet Culver

Iowa farm boy.

Empty suit.

3. Leonard Boswell [**Extensive**]

Lame duck. I think he's been in way too long.

Vietnam vet.

Lacks a little charisma, but I don't have anything bad.

He's a hard worker, think he probably comes as close to voting his conscience as any of them.

Career politician. Bothers me like Grassley, it's going against the whole idea of what a politician is supposed to be.

My initial thought is time for change. Maybe need to set some term limits. . . for example Grassley, Harkin. . . Go both ways on that.

Lame duck. He's been in there so long. Just kind of going with the flow. Never hear anything. . .

Like one of them guys in the shadows, gets his paycheck, gets reelected. Great for him, not so great for Iowa.

Shook his hand a few times. . . I think he has the values of the majority of good. . . He wants to do good for the people, don't know if he gets it done.

I think he's a real person. . . Ready for a change too, probably, but they'd need to come up with a positive alternative.

Things that stand out?

Vietnam war hero.

4. Jeff Lamberti [**Extensive**]

Rich kid.

Family of a wal mart owner, so he's got money.

Pretty negative campaigner.

I think of him as a state rep who seems to be pretty high profile in the legislature, but I'm not sure he's ready for statewide office.

Seems to be like unless you look for answers, all you hear is the negative from both sides. To say what do you think of lamberti, I only know what he's telling me and what boswell's telling

me. . . I don't know much about him. From his ads, he seems like a go-getter. That's a strong suit, but boswell's been in office a long time. . . Same way he's out for himself. . . Each tells a lie about the other one, you don't know what to believe what not to believe.

5. Congress

- Is the current Congress worse than in times past or is this just politics as usual? Republican majority. Sellout. I feel that most congressmen have ulterior motives, working for somebody else — not the common person. As soon as they win the election they go to work making sure they get corporations to fund their campaign. They work for special interest groups — whoever give them the most money, that's what they go with. That's kind of the way all politicians are. Once they get elected, they don't do what they promise. . . Imagine how different congress would be if they weren't making 150k per year, and they had to have a real job.

[Written Exercise – Handouts #1 and #2]

6. Now I'd like to talk specifically about George W. Bush.

- What good things come to mind when you think of Bush? **[Discuss]**
I thought he handled 9/11 pretty well initially. didn't act too quickly or irrationally. From that point on it gets a little hairy, I guess. Initially he handled 9/11 well. He seems sincere. I think he's a nice guy. I think he's decisive. Doesn't matter what people think. Doesn't back down. Persistent. Kept saddam from committing a genocide in iraq. I think he really does wish he could make the right decision for the US. He's got a lot on his plate and maybe his advisors don't always give him the proper advice.

- What doubts do you have? What worries you about him? **[Extensive]**
His presidential speeches need a little work. I used to love to watch a good speech. I like his speeches. He's not a big politician, speaking all over my head. He talks like a normal person you'd meet on the street. I don't know if this war is trying to bring democracy over there or if it's about the money and the oil. He's from an oil family. Big business. I still don't know why we went to Iraq, was it to finish the job his father did? Or oil? I wrote about his father, too. Never admits to making a mistake.

I feel like he doesn't care about american's freedoms. I keep thinking about the janet Jackson thing. . .

I think a lot of the problems we've been talking about, instead of doing something, they let them slide.

IV. Election 2006 (10 minutes)

In less than two months, we will have elections for Congress, so let's talk about the upcoming elections now.

1. For you personally, what is this upcoming election about? What is the most important factor that will determine how you vote for Congress?

The future, if the right people are going to be in there.

I think illegal immigration's a big issue too. But I'm not certain there's anyone — they all speak about it, but I'm not sure anyone's willing to do anything.

Retirements, people with social security. I don't know if the kids today are even going to be able to have a retirement.

Can't depend on social security.

My biggest concern is the religious right. There's enough of them there. . .

I don't know that either candidate's going to sway anything. . .

I'd like someone who has an exit plan for Iraq. Who'll do something to promote alternative energy. I'd like to see someone take a stand on illegal immigration.

Needs to be more positive advertising. But the negativity is essentially their way of pointing out weaknesses in the other candidate. So it comes with the territory.

I get tired of them, that's all I hear. They just want to slam each other. The way our congress works, who knows what else was on that bill. . .

Should make it easy to vote.

Should make it mandatory. I notice this year the telephone ads — I want to talk to you about Boswell — that's so sneaky, leaves a negative connotation.

I want to watch the campaigns, see which will be tougher on sex offender laws.

I don't hear an ad saying "these are the top 5 things my campaign is about"

■ Probe on personal traits, but push through to issues as well

2. So what are you hearing so far in this election? Have you heard anything from the candidates here in Iowa, the candidates that you will be choosing from?

■ Stay focused on House race

3. Let's talk about the Republicans and the elections for Congress in November.

- When thinking about your vote, what reasons are there to vote for the Republicans?
- And what holds you back from voting for the Republicans?
- What are the consequences if Republicans remain in power?
 - **Probe on Iraq, Social Security, gas prices, health care, any other concerns that have been raised**

4. Now, let's talk about the Democrats and the elections for Congress in November.

- When thinking about your vote, what reasons are there to vote for the Democrats?
- And what holds you back from voting for the Democrats?
- If Democrats take back control of the House and/or the Senate, how will things be different in this country? What, if anything, will change in Washington?

V. Ad Testing (55 minutes)

[Written Exercise – Handouts #3-#11]

As many of you have probably seen already, everyone’s favorite part of the campaign season – the television ads – have already begun here in Florida. I’d like to show you some of these ads, and for each one, I’d like you to do two things:

First, rate how this ad makes you feel about your choice in this election on this scale (explain scale, shown below).

<i>More</i>										<i>More</i>
<i>Likely</i>					<i>No</i>					<i>Likely</i>
<i>Boswell</i>					<i>Diff</i>					<i>Lamberti</i>
5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5

Then below that, in just a few words or phrases, tell me **in your own words** what this ad says to you – that is, if you were watching television at home and saw this ad, what would you take away from it?

Lamberti contrast on taxes, spending, and balanced budget

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D

Looks like a good clean family man. Said change. Lower your taxes.
 Blue collar, working class. Wasn’t overly negative.
 Wasn’t really a negative ad. If that’s the honest truth, then good.
 How do we know it’s true?
 The change part is good.
 I like the first part, then he threw in the Boswell part and lost me.
 Will he really cut taxes? He’s one of how many?
 Anybody wants their taxes cut.

Others?

Typical politician telling you what you want to hear.

Boswell negative on cut corp. taxes, oppose min wage, supported by oil/tobacco

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
1		1		1	2	2	1			1

Minimum wage. Something about big tobacco.
 Special interest groups handing them money.
 More specifically contradicted lamberti’s ad. When he voted to raise taxes. And he pointed out that he voted against minwage and for a pay raise for himself. I didn’t hear a lot of positive about himself, though.
 I felt the same way. More reaction than action. When somebody says PAC, let’s see a list of both sides. Raises doubts about Boswell.

It's great he's fighting for his job by throwing out a bunch of negative stuff about lamberti. Made me wonder about what interests are funding him.

Lamberti negative on security, missing intel mtg, vote agst missile defense

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
		1		4	1	2		1		

I gave him a 1 because I had questions about — if I had the facts, maybe I'd give him a higher score. . . I know boswell was sick. . . What else was on that bill?

Maybe raise a little doubt, but I'd need more facts.

I realize it was negative toward boswell, but the overwhelming thing was that there was an important vote and he wasn't there. If he was ill, that's one thing. But we're paying these guys to be there.

It's just the fact he was a no-show.

Others?

We don't know why he didn't show up.

It's negative.

Boswell positive bio

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
						2	3	2	1	1

It was a positive ad, important issues. He was a Vietnam war vet.

He's specific in that ad. Not talking about other people, talking about him and what he does.

Demonstrates he's working on something.

Issues he was talking about, didn't get too deep in them.

Gave the impression he's strong on illegal immigration and sex offenders. But the information is too vague.

Billions could mean they supported a bunch of countries to keep them from coming here.

It was mostly positive but not specific enough for me to really decide who to vote for. Need a lot more information than that ad.

NRCC negative on immigration

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
				2	4	1	2			

Seems like one minute he's going with it and then the next he's voting against doing what he has to do.

Important issue, but what I hate in those ads is how they always show the opposition and make them look really bad. Even if I like the message, it turns me off.

This is a big issue for you, but doesn't move you. . . why?

Not enough info.

Whole ad turns me off. So negative. The ad itself is flawed.

No idea what lamberti stands for.

We've seen other ads where he looks healthier, and this ad picked the worst shots. Showed him in a bad light. Illegal immigration is an important issue. . . Voted against the national ID? That's a good thing for me.

Impacts of back and forth?

Don't think anyone will be good on taxes. Immigration, said boswell voted for millions, don't know what it went to. Maybe the two or three things that came up on that last ad he voted against. So we don't know what he voted for.

Hold back because of this?

More towards lamberti because of these.

Seems like there's an awful lot of negative stuff about him supporting illegal immigration. I'd lean more towards lamberti. Boswell's been there for I don't know how long. Whatever he voted for on immigratin, it's been ineffective. Maybe it's time for a change to get someone in there.

Doubts about Lamberti?

Pretty negative campaign, don't know what he stands for.

Such a negative campaigner. When they get into that, I quit hearing the issues. Turns me off.

CAP ad [EXTENSIVE]

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
		1	1	1	4	1		1		

Talked about change. It was positive. It felt like changing government.

What said change?

They actually said it.

Specifics?

Get out of iraq, looked like real people.

Lamberti is so negative, such a negative campaigner.

- What does this ad mean to you?

We can do anything if we decided to do it.

It's a feel good ad.

There's a lot of positive speak, but I don't know if — seems obviously geared toward the democratic side, but I don't know if any of those things will change if the Dems are in office.

I didn't see which side it was for.

Specifically when they talk about hope rather than — that's something the Dems are big on.

It's a nice warm and fuzzy ad, but it's not specific enough and doesn't say who they are and what they want to do.

Didn't do nothing for me. Happy ad, but didn't do anything.

Talk is cheap, are they actually going to do something or are they just talking?

Obviously they want change, but in this case — overall that means Democrats, but in this case Boswell — lamberti would be change.

If you knew who was in control, would it push you?

Maybe towards dems.

What's it missing?

They don't identify themselves.

Maybe it is a republican ad.

I think just the opposite.

It's confusing.

“New Direction, etc. . .” Mean anything?

No plan, just talking about change.

- Do you associate these things with one party or the other?
- Would it make you more likely to vote?

It's empowering.

I'm definitely going to vote.

IF you were on the fence, an ad like this could motivate you to get out there.

September Fund – talking to Bush

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
					4	2	1		1	

Dems?

Just a laundry list of blunders. Not just bush but the whole congress and the president. I say Dem because I don't know who else would run it. It's definitely time for a change.

Brought a lot of issues that are issues today. I didn't feel clear to the left there because about half those issues were issues when they were in power, too. Minwage has been low for a long time.

And reps have only been in power 6 years.

I agree. Those have been issues a long time. There were some things in there that I tend to be more right on, so they weren't blunders for me.

I like bush, I don't agree with all his policies, but I like him. He didn't do it by himself, congress could have stepped up.

I thought it was anti-Bush. At first I thought it might make you anti bush, but it won't influence you.

It appeals to somebody who's already decided.

Humor?

Didn't really catch it until the end. But the one thing that grabbed me was Katrina.

I resent it because I don't think you should relate our politics to comedy.

September Fund – Democratic agenda

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
			1		3	4		1		

Dems?

I thought it was a good ad to give the dem stance, but I didn't think — I still have doubts that those issues can be maintained.

They didn't say what they'll do about them. Didn't say how.

No ideas.

It's a positive message, but don't believe they'd do it. Had 40 years in power and didn't do anything. I guess I don't believe it.

Talking about things that interest you?

I guess.

They're interesting issues, but I Don't see how they can do them without raising the deficit.
 Much too simplistic.
 No substance.
 Lot of talk about change. But it seems like a common theme --- we need a change --- but there's no ideas, no plans given. We're going to do these things, but how? What ideas? Other than "change"?

VoteVets

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
					1	2	2	1	2	1

You just can't forget the people who served.
 That's exactly it.
 When was the last time you heard congressional people give themselves a pay cut?
 And they cut benefits for other people.
 Care for the military should absolutely be number 1.
 It wouldn't be such a big deal if we weren't in a war, but they're cutting benefits?
 That's beyond me. I just don't understand how they can rationalize doing that. It's the common sense thing. You're asking these men and women to serve in war time, but you'll cut benefits?
 I'm a vet, I've been fighting 15/20 years to get my benefits. It's not fair.
 It's never been fair, but then to cut it, it's rubbing salt in the wound.
 To give themselves a pay raise and then cut out the benefits? It's. . .

Exploitative?

I just don't like using people like that, especially for politics.
 It would kind of make you want to believe what he's saying. . .
 It's just reality.
 If that's the truth, he'd be the perfect spokesman. There's just not enough information --- if it's true, I'm a five.
 If they'd given whatever the opponent voted for, it'd be over the top.

Why not negative?

It's specific, this is what happened.
 I think it's negative. I can't imagine a politician voting against spending money on vets. They barely vote against money on anything.
 I don't consider it negative, I consider it extremely immoral on the other side.

For all ads:

- **Show of hands, then discuss each one**
- **Explore takeaways**
- **Which of these ads addresses what is important in the election?**
- *Probe on takeaways: do Republican tax and immigration attacks hold you back from the Democrat? Are you concerned about Democratic Congress?*

CAP 60 Second.

[no rating]

Different reax?

First one I rated 5, that's probably a 2. It just talks about change, but doesn't say what.

No ideas. . .

The old footage?

Instills a bit of American pride.

More politically neutral than the other one.

Talked a lot about together. Together who? As democrats? As reps and dems alike?

I think what they're trying to do is bring America together to vote. . . It really does seem like it was set up to promote people going out and voting.

Look at what we've done, this is your job to keep doing this. Promote a future.

It wasn't the same ad. It wasn't identical, right? Just a twist on the words. The other talked about getting out of iraq, this talked about change.

VI. Final Ballot (5 minutes)

[Written exercise – Handout #11]

1. Finally, I want you to choose, if the election were held today, which one you would vote for – based on everything we've discussed tonight. Circle which candidate you would choose, then briefly write why in the space below. **[Written only]**